

## THE EPISODE OF BĀLIN IN THE RĀMĀYAṆA

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The *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki is one of the greatest and noblest works in Sanskrit literature. Yet it is a pity that it has not come down to us in its original form. The German scholar Hermann Jacobi gave irrefutable arguments to prove that not only the whole of the last book and the greater part of the first book of this epic were later additions, but there were many interpolations even in the genuine five books. Here we intend to discuss threadbare the episode of Bālin occurring in the fourth book of the *Rāmāyaṇa* known as the Kiṣkindhā Kāṇḍa.<sup>1</sup>

The episode of Bālin occurs in cantos XII to XXV of the fourth book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is strange that while according to cantos XVI, XVII and XVIII of this book Rāma appears to have killed Bālin treacherously, according to the statements, occurring in other parts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself, he is clearly said to have killed Bālin in a battle. The relevant passages are as follows.

The first canto of the first book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, while giving the contents of the epic, clearly says in verse 55 that Rāma killed Bālin in a battle. In the fifth book again Hanumat tells Sitā in verse 50 of canto 35 that Rāma killed Bālin in a battle. Hanumat himself again says the same thing to Bharata at the end of the sixth book in verse 38 of canto 126.

These statements of the *Rāmāyaṇa* find support in the story of Rāma occurring in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Brahma Purāṇa*. An identical verse found in *Harivaṃśa* 5. 41. 133 and *Brahma Purāṇa* 213. 136 says that Rāma, having killed Bālin in a battle, crowned Sugrīva as king in his place. What is most intriguing in this connection is the fact that canto XIX of the fourth book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, going against the account of the earlier cantos, gives an account of the battle between Rāma and Bālin in verses 11 to 13. When Tārā, the wife of Bālin, expresses her suspicion that Rāma killed Bālin from a far off place with his far reaching arrows, the Vānaras give the following reply :

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<sup>1</sup> The critical edition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* published by the Oriental Institute, Baroda, has been used throughout this article for reference.

“( Thank God that ) your son is living. Go back and protect him. Yama assuming the shape of Rāma has killed Bālin. Having pieced trees and big rocks hurled at him, Rāma killed Bālin with his sharp arrows resembling the thunderbolt. When that lion among Vānaras, having the glow of Indra, was killed, the defeated army of Vānaras fled away.”

Here a battle between Rāma and Bālin has been described in unequivocal language. The question naturally arises as to why there is no reference to any such battle in canto 16. The only possible answer is that some verses describing the battle between Rāma and Bālin, which preceded the present verse 25 of canto 16 of the *Kiṣkindhā Kāṇḍa*, were very early lost. With the loss of these verses a misunderstanding naturally arose that Rāma killed Bālin surreptitiously. This gave rise to several explanatory interpolations resulting in a number of contradictions in the story of Bālin and his brother Sugrīva occurring in cantos XII to XIX of the *Kiṣkindhā Kāṇḍa* which we shall now discuss.

In canto XII all the matter following verse 13 is clearly interpolated because according to it Rāma has already arrived in *Kiṣkindhā*, whereas in the following canto he is still shown to be on the *Riṣyamūka* hill from where his journey to *Kiṣkindhā* is described. The fourteenth canto is likewise interpolated barring verses 2 and 3 which are clearly related to canto XV and were originally at its beginning. To establish some sort of connection between the interpolated canto XIV and the following genuine canto, verses 9 and 10 were interpolated in the latter.

The seventeenth and eighteenth cantos are indubitably interpolated. When once the misgiving that Bālin was killed by Rāma without any warning had been firmly established, it was natural for interpolators to feel that this episode would be incomplete without showing Bālin's condemnation of Rāma's action and Rāma's reply to it. These cantos were added to fill this supposed lacuna, and, to establish a superficial connection of these cantos with the genuine canto XIX, a verse was interpolated at the beginning of the latter.

The inconsistencies that arose as a result of these interpolations are too glaring to be missed by any intelligent reader. Many proofs can be adduced to show the interpolated nature of cantos XVII and XVIII. Thus in the sixteenth canto Bālin is said to have fallen unconscious as a result of the arrow shot at him by Rāma. There is, however, not the least sign of this unconsciousness in the seventeenth canto. On the contrary, as soon as Rāma

approaches Bālin after shooting the arrow at him, the latter begins to talk with Rāma. The second proof of the interpolated nature of these two cantos is that canto XIX follows the events of canto XVI and not those of these two cantos. Thus in canto XVIII Rāma is pacified after his dialogue with Bālin and so the fleeing of the Vānaras through fear of Rāma as described in canto XIX, has no *raison d'être*. On the other hand the event of Bālin falling unconscious after being pierced by the arrow of Rāma as described in canto XVI is again referred to in canto XIX, thus showing its direct connection with canto XVI. When we realize this connection between canto XVI and canto XIX, the fleeing of Vānaras through fear of Rāma as described in the latter canto is fully understandable. The third proof of the interpolated nature of cantos XVII and XVIII is that according to the first verse of canto XXII, Bālin, after being struck by the arrow of Rāma, first saw Sugrīva and not Rāma or Lakṣmaṇa as appears from canto XVII. Since the description of events following the shooting of Bālin as found in canto XIX of Kiṣkindhā Kāṇḍa is in disagreement only with the interpolated portions mentioned above, the removal of these portions frees the episode of Bālin of all contradictions and establishes the fact that, according to the genuine account of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma killed Bālin in a battle provoked by the latter's attack on him.